

The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 7

DECEMBER 13, 1939

DEAR MEMBER,

The wanton attack of Russia on Finland has aroused world-wide indignation. The perfidy and unscrupulousness of this unprovoked aggression cannot be dissociated from the denial of God, which is the canker at the root of Russian Communism, and, as is now apparent, is perverting to base ends a movement marked in its earlier stages by a high social idealism and the promise of significant social reconstruction. But merely to be shocked is to miss the deep meaning of these events. Evil is an active force which silently spreads its infection through the body politic. The moral corruption which is poisoning the life-blood of Western civilisation can be expelled only by an upsurge of health-giving forces. The vital question is whether there is among the peoples of the world a positive purpose clear and strong enough to counteract the progressive lowering of the standards of international morality and to make international good faith and respect for the rights of weaker peoples the guiding principles of the actual practice of States.

A BLOW FOR A BLOW

Words were used by Monsieur Daladier in the Chamber of Deputies a fortnight ago which raise in clear-cut form the issue of reprisals: "We will give blow for blow. If the destructive fury of the enemy descends on our towns and villages we will hit back at him with the same severity." The question of retaliation is bound to come more and more to the fore as the war proceeds.

A blow for a blow belongs to the nature of war. It is futile to have recourse to violence unless one intends to hit one's hardest. The principle of war is in fact expressed in David Harum's version of the golden rule—"Do unto the other feller the way he'd like to do unto you—an' do it fust." But if violence and the working of the war machine are allowed to become ends in themselves, the struggle becomes merely a cat and dog fight and man sinks to the level of the beasts—or rather below that level because of the perversion of his higher nature. In that case the pacifist is right and the conflict becomes so completely inhuman that the Christian can have nothing to do with it.

Everything turns, therefore, on the quality and continuance of the purpose in the service of which violence is used. The only justification for anything so monstrous as modern war is that it is in given circumstances the only means of preventing the destruction of certain values and ways of life that have through the labours of generations been embodied in the tradition and institutions of society. This country claims to be defending such values. The purpose must determine the means used to further it. If our aim is the ultimate inclusion of the German people in a community of

nations firmly established on the reconciliation of enemies, our objective will keep us from having recourse to certain means such as the terrorisation of civilian populations by indiscriminate bombing. *Mere* retaliation is incompatible with a moral purpose. It is to allow policy to be determined by our opponents, and is, therefore, the negation and surrender of our own purpose. Our efforts to mitigate the senseless brutality of war must be directed to the positive end of making clear to ourselves and to others the moral purpose which alone can redeem war from meaninglessness and of holding firmly to it in face of every temptation to abandon or compromise it.

THE PARISH IN WAR-TIME

In the notes this week a brief account is given of welfare services to meet war needs. The ordinary work of the parson or minister in the parish in war-time is of equal importance.

In many country districts village schools have been doubled, which means extra work among children both in and out of school. There are the additional claims of visits to the wives and parents of those who have joined the Forces; of correspondence with those who are serving in the Forces and with the chaplains who are in touch with them; of hospital patients from the large cities and evacuated institutions such as cripples homes; of small, scattered units of the various branches of national service. All this increased work has to be carried on with little glamour, with slender means and without the margin of resources which might in small ways alleviate the burden. Many parishes cannot afford to keep curates.

In the larger centres of population many of the congregation, adults as well as children, have gone. Lay men and women who took an active part in Church activities have been called to other tasks. Church buildings have been commandeered. New needs have presented themselves. In the cities large numbers of children have been running wild. A letter in *The Times* last week paid a warm tribute to what the clergy have done in East London to meet the needs of youth. The black-out threw the ordinary routine of the parish out of gear. Evening meetings, especially for young people, are now being restarted—Bible classes, education classes or, as one of our members writes to me, a meeting in the minister's house for parents whose sons are away, when news is exchanged and the absent ones are remembered by name. Clergy who are not wedded to routine and have initiative are finding new opportunities in the changed situation.

While many of the younger clergy feel a strong call to volunteer as chaplains, it is a question whether there may not be an even larger field of service at home, more particularly among the children and youth on whose moral and spiritual quality the future of the nation depends. The immense opportunities offered by the ordinary work of the parish cannot be left entirely to older men.

PRAYER IN TIME OF WAR

I have had a number of letters about difficulties in regard to prayer in time of war. It is in prayer that the tension between the Christian purpose in life and the frightful evil of war is most acutely felt.

The chief question, I think, in the minds of those who write is whether we may pray for victory. One of our collaborators, who is himself a pacifist, writes to me that, if we believe it to be God's will that the nation should go to war to achieve certain ends, we ought unquestionably to pray for victory. If we cannot pray for victory we

ought not to be in the enterprise at all. I believe this to be a true view, but to pray for victory is the most searching act in which we can engage. What we can pray for as Christians is not *our* victory, as though the British Empire were in any sense God's favourite. It is for the triumph in the life of society of certain values which we humbly hope that we have been called, in spite of our unworthiness and manifold shortcomings, to defend and to work for in days to come.

If God is the Father of all men, we come to Him always as members of His human family and therefore always in company with our "enemies." We may not pray for what in principle they cannot pray for. We can both pray for the vindication of right, and we may plead before God for what, with such light as He has been pleased to give us, we believe to be the right; but always with the sense of the limitations of our own understanding and a willingness to leave it to Him to answer our prayers and those of our fellow Christians in Germany according to His own wisdom and purpose.

It is a help in our prayers to remember that the fundamental act in prayer is adoration. It is the worship of the creator by the creature. As such it is the most selfless of all feelings. It enables us to keep our sense of proportion and saves us from losing hold of the reality of God through absorption in our small planetary affairs. When we and those against whom we are fighting forget ourselves in contemplation of God we are united across all dividing gulfs.

CHRISTMAS

The Supplement next week will be an article on Christmas by Miss Dorothy L. Sayers.

I hope that you like our leaflet suggesting a subscription to the News-Letter as a Christmas present. We now have a permit to send it to all allied and neutral countries, and some of you may have friends abroad who would appreciate receiving it week by week.

Our thoughts naturally turn at this season to the world-wide Christian society, which had its origin in the birth at Bethlehem and the unity of which is not something yet to be achieved, but is, in spite of outward divisions and warring peoples, an already given fact. I am sure you will be grateful to me for calling your attention to a little book which has just come into my hands. It contains reproductions of pictures and carvings by Indian, African and Chinese artists, inspired by the Christian story. It is a moving reminder of the universality of the appeal of Christ to the human heart. The title is "The Son of Man," and it is published by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (15, Tufton Street, Westminster, S.W.1.). The price is 1s. 6d.

Yours sincerely,

20, BALCOMBE STREET,
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LONDON, N.W.1.

D. H. De Laan

WELFARE ACTIVITIES FOR THE FORCES

The Government recently announced the setting up of an organisation to provide for the social welfare of the troops, with which the various voluntary organisations would be invited to co-operate.

All the voluntary organisations provide huts or hostels of varying sizes, which usually consist of canteens, reading, writing and recreation rooms and a room for religious services. One innovation, arising from the peculiarities of modern warfare, has been the equipment of mobile units for visiting outlying military posts and small encampments in sparsely inhabited country.

In Scotland a committee of the CHURCH OF SCOTLAND has provided a chain of huts and canteens throughout the whole country, from the Orkney Islands to the Borders. Already seventy canteens have been established, and more than a dozen huts are being erected at strategic points where there are large concentrations of troops. Many more will be required and supplied. For smaller and more scattered units mobile canteens, travelling cinemas and supplies of books, magazines and games are being provided. In many places the other Churches in Scotland are co-operating in this scheme.

The CHURCH ARMY has three main lines of activity. First, there is the spiritual work of the evangelists which is carried on in each command. A number of small buildings have been allocated to the Church Army for use as huts of silence. Secondly, there is the provision of recreational centres in various parts of the country staffed by an evangelist and his wife who supervise the centres and are able to discuss their difficulties with the men who frequent them. Thirdly, the Church Army has erected a number of large huts of its own in or near the camps allotted to its care. These have an average attendance of some thousands each week.

The work of TOC H is linked for the most part with the Services, but attention has also been given to the needs of the evacuation areas and munition centres. Since the war began 200 small "Talbot Houses"—each with a chapel—"the heart of the house"—a recreation room and a canteen, have been opened. A distinctive feature of these houses is that they are located outside the camps, the aim being to create a centre with a more homely

character and to provide a change of scene from life in camp. When the war came twelve of the large permanent peace-time "Talbot Houses" began to undertake extended welfare work in their districts. Twelve new houses have been opened at munition centres, and requests for others are continually being received. TOC H has several huts and a large stone clubhouse in commission at Scapa Flow. A long-established "Talbot House" in France has been constantly used since the war began by men of the British Expeditionary Force quartered in the vicinity.

The Y.M.C.A. has now opened about 400 centres in Great Britain at the chief training centres and the most important defence and munition points. Civilian needs have also been met in a number of places. Camps for evacuated children, hostels for foreign refugees from the Continent and social clubs for the wives of men called up have been established. An important side of the work is the letters-to-home arrangements, by which many thousands are able to maintain human contact with family and friends. The mobile units which reach scattered and small anti-aircraft sections throughout the country take with them books and refreshments, and also render a much-appreciated service of collecting and washing soiled underwear. It is intended to provide talks on a variety of subjects, including, by popular demand, astronomy.

The SALVATION ARMY has also a number of mobile units. In peace-time there were thirty-two hostels at troop stations at home and abroad. Since the war there has been a great increase in the work of its hostels. 142 new centres have been opened, while the number is being added to at the rate of three a week. The Salvation Army has over 6,000 officers in Great Britain taking an active part in welfare work. One of their most important functions is to maintain a link through each other between men with the forces and the families at home.

Preparations have been made by all the voluntary organisations for beginning work among the British Expeditionary Force in France and other parts of the world, but at the time of writing permission to begin work abroad has not yet been granted, though it is expected to be given shortly.

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THE CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER, 20, BALCOMBE STREET, DORSET SQUARE, LONDON, N.W.1.

CAN THE FEELINGS BE CHANGED?

My dear Oldham:

Since the war began I have listened to, or read, a great many pronouncements by Christian leaders and thinkers. From these I have learnt much, and hope to learn more, not least through the CHRISTIAN NEWS-LETTER. But they have often left in my mind a disquiet, for all the help they have given. I have felt that something has been left out, something vitally important to any distinctive and creative Christian witness in these days.

My concern is this: that again and again in the interpretation of current events God is presented in such wise that His interest in and concern for, and personal dealing with, individual men and women are almost entirely lost to view. I think that this is, for example, in some degree true of the fine statement on "What is God doing?" in the first supplement of the C.N.-L. We are given a picture of God at work in history, over long periods of time, in relation to nations, social systems, and the rise and fall of civilisations. The general impression left on the mind is of One who, in His vast and patient strategy, not only here and now grasps and uses even the vile and destructive ambitions of unscrupulous men, but also is content to wait while the deeper and more hidden forces of human history come to maturity. If they be misguided and evil, they frustrate themselves in some such universal disaster as war; if good, He builds them into His purposes, for indeed they come from Him.

WHERE DOES THE INDIVIDUAL COME IN?

Now I am sure that this large-scale way of looking at things is very necessary. A Christian interpretation of what is going on in the world to-day, which shall meet us

where we are and not be a piece of silly sentimentality, must be in terms commensurate with the forces involved. It is an overwhelmingly tremendous situation in which we are fated to be alive, and part of its tremendousness is that we who are now in it are aware of it as a *world* situation, are conscious, however dimly, of the thrust of titanic, subterranean forces within externally observable "newspaper" events. The Christian reading of the signs of the times must have, therefore, a tremendous, cosmic note in it. It must think of God as the Lord of history and of the procession of the ages. But—and this, as already indicated, is my difficulty—in such an interpretation, if we are not careful, the individual man, his fate and destiny, his intimate personal concerns, are almost completely lost to view. I am reminded of the pathetic little man in the bowler hat who flitted in and out of the scenes of "1066 and all that" and asked "And where do I come in?"

SUFFERING IS PERSONAL

This seems to me to be a serious matter. For one thing, it is hardly necessary to be a distinctively Christian believer to accept such an interpretation of events and such a picture of God. It is only necessary to believe, however vaguely, in a power not ourselves making for righteousness. I am impressed sometimes by the similarity which the utterances on the war of accredited Christian leaders bear to those who make no profession of Christianity at all. For another thing, such a picture of God is distressingly similar to precisely the sort of thing we are supposed to be fighting in this war, namely, a view of life which sacrifices the individual man to some ongoing purpose, some dominant, directing will which has little regard for

him as an individual with loves, longings and purposes of his own. But, apart from these two things, the serious thing is that this line of thought does not meet men and women at the point where their feelings are most poignantly stirred. It is precisely the destruction of tens of thousands of *individual* persons in all this business—the cruel bitterness and misery and frustration of life, men and women driven to suicide, children wailing in terror under the bombs dropping from that heaven to which they should look up with light and laughter in their eyes—that stuns and agitates and inflames the feelings the more so when those of their own circle are sucked down and disappear into the abyss of it all.

FEELINGS—A KEY FACTOR

I believe this matter of the feelings is of the very highest importance. It is, in fact, the main reason of my writing to you. A Christian witness which is not penetrating people's minds on the plane of their feelings is going to lose much of its relevance and its effect. It is feelings, after all, which more than anything else determine attitudes and actions, and feeling is apt to be stimulated far more by the pressures of immediate personal situations than by highly generalised judgments about history and Providence and the bases of a new order. Take, for example, the question of peace terms now so much under discussion. It is not difficult to think out, in a general way, high-minded peace terms at this stage when the war has hardly begun, but it will be an entirely different matter to get them acted upon after years of bitter suffering and loss, if it should come to that. It is this disturbance of feeling, this violence done to the emotional nature, as war comes crashing hideously into individual situations and into the delicate fabric of personal relationships, which explains in part the deterioration of fine ideals and sentiments which always goes on in the course of war. It is too much to expect of the natural man, even of the highly moralised man, to be generous when his whole life has been wrecked, his home blown to pieces, his children slaughtered.

It is somewhat naïve to expect that what was done at, and after, Versailles will not be repeated, just because it has, in fact, led to another war. Such an expectancy forgets that man is not a wholly reasonable being, least of all during and after war. All mere exhortations not to hate (though in a way, I suppose, we cannot have too many of these) forget how swiftly feeling escapes control, especially when violently stimulated by some unusually pungent fact in our own immediate situation. Most of our tempers are, in fact, as someone once said, like canal bridges—only sufficient to carry the ordinary traffic of the district.

RE-INTERPRETATION IN THE SPHERE OF FEELING

The only way in which feelings can be checked, cleansed and ennobled is for the situation which gives rise to them to be seen in such a new light that it becomes in effect a different situation. It must be radically re-interpreted. But the new interpretation must itself have feeling-power, and it must have it with something of the same personal and individual relevancy and poignancy as that which it is to elevate or replace. It is precisely here that the wider interpretations of God's good purpose in history fail. On the other hand, I am sure that such wider interpretations cannot be left on one side. For us modern men the personal situation is part of a world situation. If we are to see it in a new light we must be given a renewed sense of the significance of history for God, a renewed sense that it is not what it so often appears to be, "a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing." Yet that, repeat, is not by itself enough.

What is needed is an understanding of God which shall enable us to see Him at work in the big events; yet also to see Him as giving "the little man in the bowler hat" a really personal significance in relation to it all. Yet even that does not state it properly. We must add—I hope I do not labour this too much, but it is the main point of my letter—that the significance of the individual must be established in such wise that the piercing and violent emotions of personal war-situations are dealt with, are cleanse and ennobled. Otherwise the deterioration

of mood and temper will go on, even in Christian folk, as the war proceeds.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED IN THE CROSS

If now you ask me how this is to be done my answer will, I fear, seem very inadequate. Indeed, it quite certainly will be inadequate. For obviously it is not possible, even if there were the capacity, to take up all the deep problems involved in the Christian understanding of God's purposes in history and in the individual lives of men and women. I want only to throw out one main thought—one that touches the chief concern of this letter—namely, the purification and ennoblement of feeling in the stress of war.

Briefly, what is in my mind is this: if we are to preserve a quiet faith in God's lordship over the vast, wholesale events of these times in a way that keeps our thoughts and feelings about individual men and women from going, under stress, disastrously astray, there must be a persistent and deliberate bringing of everything back to the Cross. And by persistent and deliberate I mean persistent and deliberate. Everything must be brought into its presence, but most of all when feelings are deeply agitated. I am sure that the Church—which means individual Christian men and women—is under call to-day to make a new commitment of itself to the conviction that in the Cross of Jesus Christ the mystery of this otherwise so unintelligible world is made clear. Only as we make the effort to grasp its meaning and apply its message to ourselves will the *distinctively* Christian mind be brought to bear on the situation, no matter how many other true and relevant things may be said.

Let me illustrate in relation to what has been said earlier in this letter.

Whatever else the Cross means, it means, if our belief in the Incarnation is true, that the divine purpose which holds the whole of history so mysteriously in its grasp is none the less *in* history at the point of its most poignant and tragic suffering. The suffering of mankind is God's also. These statements sound dreadfully abstract, but the truth that is in them ceases to be abstract precisely at the point where it is related to real situations, and therefore to

real need. Then it begins to speak its divine message to the imagination and the heart. Then it begins to touch the springs of feeling. Take, for example, the unspeakable horrors of Poland or the concentration camps. It is not enough, in face of that sort of thing, to tell ourselves or others that God is righteous, still less that God is love. That again is too abstract; but it is also too glib, too easy—like spraying a shambles with a little verbal rose-water. It is merely to write up a pretty motto over—horror. But to see the Cross of the incarnate Lord at the heart of it all—that is an entirely different matter. Then the situation is a different situation, as different as it could well be. Then the tragedy is not man's tragedy only. It is God's, and because it is *God's*, it is not final, unrelieved tragedy, not even for the most insignificant man, woman or child in it.

NOT ONLY THE TORTURED BUT THE TORTURERS

Again, in respect of the feelings of bitterness and hatred which flood the heart against the perpetrators of these outrages, the sort of feelings which are even now being evoked by the publication of the Government White Paper on atrocities in Nazi concentration camps. It is not enough to exhort people not to hate and call for vengeance. They feel it right to hate and call for vengeance. It is not sufficient to call such feelings "petty," as is done in your quotation from a Chinese magazine in the first number of the News-Letter. They are not petty in their psychological power, nor for those who feel them do they seem petty in respect of their moral justification. I find I cannot just simply say to a girl refugee whom I know and whose father has suffered in a concentration camp, when I see her eyes flash with anger, "You must not feel like that," I must give her, as I must have myself, a new interpretation of the whole ghastly thing that does not run away from it and goes deep—deeper than the deepest sources of natural feeling. I do not know how this is to be done except by being seized with the truth, not in abstract theoretical statement, but with the feeling-force which the Cross alone gives it, that it can never be right merely to agonise

over the tortured; one must agonise also, and indeed even more, over the torturers. I know of no way of learning to recoil from evil men, and yet also to hold them in a way that gets right at the springs of hatred and vindictiveness and seals them up, except from the Cross. We need continuously to grasp and be grasped by the truth which the Cross so piercingly incarnates that whilst we were *all* yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly—died, not as a piece of purely personal idealism, but as part of that divine purpose which underlies all history and all our individual life.

THE SHARING OF POST-WAR SUFFERINGS

Finally, in respect of making peace. If this is a long war and people suffer bitterly, there is one thing which it is most urgent the Christian mind should insist upon. It will only be able to insist upon it if it keeps very close to the Cross in all its thinking and teaching meanwhile. If it does not insist upon it, nobody will, and there will be a bad peace. That one thing is this, that the only really fruitful suffering in situations where personal relations are torn to shreds is the suffering which is prepared voluntarily *to share the burden of the consequences of wrongdoing with the wrongdoer*. One of the deepest errors of Versailles from the Christian point of view was the complete refusal to do this except as circumstances compelled it. The unconfessed aim was to unload as much of the suffering as was practicable on to Germany and to compensate for one's own sufferings by a return as soon and as far

as possible, to the spacious pre-war day. Germany being left to the leanness of reparations and inflation, which, it was believed, she so richly deserved. That was all perfectly natural in view of people's lacerated feelings after four years of war. It did not make it any the less disastrous. The whole thing was helped by very inadequate teaching about suffering and sacrifice on the part of the Churches—teaching which had little of the distinctive message of the Cross in it. Not infrequently the sacrifice and sufferings of people during the war, especially that of the men who fell, were compared without any qualification to the Cross. This was misleading though understandable. The Cross was a life laid down *for one's enemies*, not only for one's friends, and nearly all its reconciling and creative power is in that fact. The point is that when the war is over we must be prepared for more sacrifice, not for less, if the world is ever to be a better place—sacrifice of a different sort, of a more productive sort, than any possible during war. There must be some costly binding up of the wounds of our enemies as well as of our own. To say that sound no doubt silly and sentimental in the ears of the world. But if it be silly and sentimental, then the Christian belief that something of the inmost heart and structure of the historical process, the very heart of God, is laid bare in Calvary is silly and sentimental, too; it is, in fact, in that case simply not true.

Yours,

HERBERT H. FARMER.

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